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Hanford Group, Inc.

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Hanford Officials Working To Slow Spread Of Contamination From Past Tank Leaks

RICHLAND, Wash.— Hanford officials have begun a project to keep water out of older tank storage areas where past tank leaks have contaminated the soil with radioactive and hazardous waste.

Crews with Department of Energy (DOE) Office of River Protection contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group are cutting unneeded water pipes, building berms around tank storage areas, and installing drainage control on nearby roads to keep water from moving toward the tanks.

“This work to keep water away from the tank farms will have a direct impact on reducing the driving force for contaminant movement in the soil around tanks,” said Rob Yasek, DOE Office of River Protection Vadose Zone project manager. “It will significantly slow down movement of contamination from past tank leaks toward groundwater and the Columbia River.”

Sixty-seven of Hanford’s older single -shell tanks have leaked or are assumed to have leaked an estimated one million gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste into the ground in the past. There is evidence some of the contamination has impacted the groundwater.

Over the decades, wastewater from past operations, runoff from rain or snow, and leaks from water pipes have transported contamination from past leaks deeper toward groundwater.

Historically, wastewater sent to retention ditches and drain fields was the major contributor of liquid to the ground in the vicinity of the tank farms. Now, leaks from aging, pressurized water lines are a concern. Several old water pipes run through and near the single -shell tank farms. Many of the pipes were installed in the 1950s, some up to the 1970s.

Old water pipes are being taken out of service by physically capping them off. The remaining active water lines will be tested periodically to ensure they aren’t leaking.

A combination of repaved roads, gutters and earthen berms are being built to divert runoff water. The project includes repaving a road next to the U Tank Farm.

“Along with moving liquid waste out of the older tanks into newer double -shell tanks and preparing our tanks to send waste to a treatment facility, this work is important to protecting the groundwater and the Columbia River,” said Rick Raymond, CH2M HILL’s vice president of projects.

Sixty percent of the nation’s nuclear waste is stored in 177 large underground tanks at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington, about seven miles from the Columbia River. The waste is the result of decades of nuclear materials production for national defense. The tanks range in size from 50-thousand to one million gallons.

CH2M HILL Hanford Group, Inc. is the Department of Energy’s Office of River Protection prime contractor with responsibility for storing, characterizing and retrieving the waste for treatment. An employee-owned company, CH2M HILL, Ltd. was founded in 1946, and today serves clients on six continents with engineering, construction and operations services for environmental, energy, water, transportation and industrial infrastructure.

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